

THE CULT OF WAIET IN THE MURRAY ISLANDS, TORRES STRAITS.

BY A. C. HADDON, SC.D., F.R.S.

I HAVE given in vol. vi, pp. 277-280 of the "Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits," Cambridge, 1908, all the information then available about Waïet of Waier, the smallest of the three Murray Islands. Through the kindness of Mr. Heber A. Longman, Director of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, I have received a most interesting description of the hitherto unrecorded cult of Waïet (accompanied by sketches of the effigy), written expressly for me in response to a request by the Director by Mr. A. O. C. Davies, formerly the schoolmaster on Mer and now in charge of a State school at Kalbar, S. E. Queensland. Mr. Davies collected the very fragmentary remains of Waïet and presented them to the Queensland Museum.

I have transcribed, with minor unimportant omissions and modifications, the account sent to me by Mr. Davies, and have clearly indicated my own remarks.

Waïet lived at Mabuiag with his wife Weiba and their only daughter Gainau. Every day he went to the waterhole on the chance of meeting women or girls who came to draw water. On meeting some he would probably select one and have intercourse with her; if he was in a contrary mood he might order his attendant *zogo-le* or *tami-leb* to cut off the girl's head.

One day, feeling indisposed, he did not go for his walk, but the *zogo-le* and *tami-leb* went as usual. On the way they met Weiba and Gainau and, being determined to emulate Waïet, seized and had intercourse with them and, moved by jealousy, cut off their heads.

On hearing the news, Waïet decided to take his drum and leave Mabuiag, and, crying and beating his drum, went to Nagai. The island of Nagai was not satisfactory, as his drum did not sound well, so he departed and came to Oidol. His drum did not sound well here, so he went to Mer. Like Malu, he went round the island and stopped at Kapeub on the other side, but as there was no suitable harbour it was "no good sitting down."

Hearing that Malu was in possession of Mer, he took a canoe and went across to Dauar. He landed at Giz, but the land was straight and did not appeal to him, so he went to Ouzes, at the sandspit called Teg. This was "no good," so he went across to Waier and, skirting the northern coast, came to the harbour on the eastern side called Nay (this is pronounced slightly differently from *Nee*, drinking water) [we write this word *ni* and the bay *Ne*]. At the head of the harbour is a nice beach of sand and pulverised pumice-stone, behind which a cliff rises to about 150 feet in height. This he climbed, and sitting down on a ledge of rock began to beat his drum. The sound echoed from the semicircle of cliffs, and pleased with the place he determined to settle there.

He again beat his drum, but more loudly than before, and began to sing. Two women, Dumieb [these are the *au kosker* "old women," Reports, vi, p. 279, pl. v, fig. 2], down at the point, heard him and began to dance. Waiet then took some yellow sprouting coconut palm leaves and put them round his head [Reports, iv, p. 35] and beat his drum still louder and sang. The two women approached him and he sat down on some coconuts (because of this the turtle-shell effigy of Waiet was placed in a sitting posture on some coconuts). When the women came up to him he had connection with them and said that he would abide there as it suited him. He micturated from the top of the cliff, which accounts for the large lagoon and the abundance of fish in it.

The cult of Waiet thus took its rise, it being the emblem of fertility of mankind, the coconuts denoting abundance of fruit and the lagoon of fish an abundant supply of fish for food.

[The *Nagai* of Mr. Davies is *Nagir*, *Oidol* is probably *Widul*, but if so the order of Waiet's journey has been inverted. I also was informed that the arrival of Waiet at Mer was subsequent to that of Malu.

I obtained three versions of the story of Waiet, as he is called by the Western Islanders. In the Tutu version (Reports, v, p. 48) Naga and Waiet (who acted as "crew" for Naga) went from the Katau River (Binaturi) (143 deg. E. long.) to Yaru (Daru) where they performed a death-dance, *markai*, and taught it to two Tutu visitors. Naga went to Augar [Uga] and showed the people there how to "make *markai*," and later settled at Tutu. In the Nagir tale (v, p. 49), Naga was a resident at Nagir who instructed the men how to make masks in the form of animals, *wui krar*, and taught them the songs and dances and everything relating to the *kwod*, and how to "make *taiai*," or funeral ceremonies. Waiet of Mabuiag came to Nagir to learn how to beat the drum, and Naga taught him. Then Waiet stole a famous mask. The Mabuiag story (v, p. 49) is much longer: There was a woman named Kuda who had two boys; they, Waiet (or Naga or Izalu) and some other people, lived on Widul, a small island off Mabuiag (I have an additional note that Kuda taught everybody how to make an earth-oven, *amai*). Kuda dressed her boys up and taught them to dance. Waiet used to play by himself, hauling up and letting down a *goa* rattle (v, p. 50). [This performance resembles an incident in the

uruba ceremony of Kiwai described by Riley (1925, p. 236). The *uruba* is a kind of memorial service for the dead and a farewell to the spirits of the dead who were returning to their home in the west.] Once Waiat went to the Fly River and thence to Mer. Waiat persuaded the woman to put the boys under his care that he might instruct them in dancing. He heard a drum sounding, and in order to find out about it went first to Badu; he was sent on to Moa and thence to Nagir. Arriving at Nagir he went to the *kwod* and saw some theriomorphic dance masks; he went behind the *waus* (v, pl. xix, fig. 2) and saw a *debu* (king-fish) mask. He then went to the village and persuaded the men to show him everything, and he commandeered the *debu* mask and took it to Gumu on Mabuag. One evening Waiat sent the women to get some water, but Goinau his wife, and their daughter Wiba, refused to go. Waiat had previously sent some men to fetch the mask from Gumu to Widul, and evidently Goinau and Wiba saw what the men were doing. The women came back with the water, and Goinau and Wiba then went to get water. Waiat said to all the men, "If any man meets any woman in the bush he must kill her, for by-and-by the women will talk in the house about what we have been doing." The men went along the road that the two women had taken and met them. The men said Waiat had told them to kill anyone they met and they would have to kill them, so they cut off their heads. On their return Waiat was informed of what had happened, and then felt very differently about the matter. In the middle of the night he killed his "mate," Manari, and the two brothers. Next morning before sunrise, as her sons were not dancing as was their wont, Kuda came to Waiat's house and asked the men to wake up her sons, but they found them dead under their mats. Kuda upbraided Waiat, who swore at her. Then her folk came; some hauled Waiat this way and some hauled him that way, and they broke his limbs, and cut off his arms at the elbows and his legs at the knees; and Waiat cried, "Please leave me alone; I am a big place, I am like the sun and the moon. Every place knows me. Leave me alone. *U, u, u, u.*" They gouged out his eyes, cut off his ears, plucked out his whiskers, tore out his lower jaw, and he moaned "*U, u, u, u.*" till he died. They took off all his black skin and rolled him about like a cask till the raw meat alone was left and he looked like a white man. It is not at present possible to co-ordinate all these various stories.]

Pasi told Mr. Davies that he was the only white man who had seen Waiat; his seeing the remains and collecting them caused considerable consternation, and for three nights he was apprehensive of his own safety, Barsa coming along at daylight to see if he were still alive.

The effigy of Waiat was in a recess of a ledge of the cliff of Waier about 150 feet above sea-level. Below this was another ledge with a number of recesses containing numerous clam-shells, which had been used for cooking purposes, and the marks of fires were still visible in several of the recesses. There were

also some small clam-shells painted with red earth, and a number of the shells which are used by the natives for scraping coconuts; these were also painted red and were held in the mouth during the ceremony.

As no ceremonies had taken place since the coming of the missionaries, the effigy had fallen into disrepair, owing to the decay of the coconut-string fastenings.

The effigy represented the head and trunk of a man, and was about 4 feet high. It had no legs and squatted on a heap of coconuts, and was made of pieces of turtle-shell neatly sewn together with coconut line. A *wangai* stake passed through the effigy and held it upright, and another stick at right angles to it supported the outstretched arms. The face was made from a large piece of turtle-shell with a border of finely carved chevrons. There was a *dari* of tern feathers which had been dipped in a mixture of blood and red earth. The mass of hair contained remains of organic tissue. Around the forehead was a string of rib-bones painted with blood and red earth. Pasi said that they were those of a white boy, but he would not say why he was killed. Around the neck hung a string of human rib-bones, also painted red, and above this a crescentic pearl-shell, *mai*. Around the waist was a string of arm and leg bones, and below this a groin-shell *ebnoa* [*eb encop* or *ebeneaup*]. A string of white cowry shells (the large sacred ones) [*bubuam*, *Amphiperas ovum*] was suspended from each shoulder and hung down in front to the waist; while down the back hung two strings of small white cowry shells painted red and joined together in the middle by a jawbone, apparently that of a young person; this was the only jawbone attached to the effigy, and in this it differed totally from the Malu mask. Both arms were extended level with the shoulders, with the palms upwards. On the left forearm was a carved turtle-shell bracer or arm-guard, *kadik*, and under the left upper arm was hung a *gabagaba* (stone-headed club) with a triangular stone head, but the handle had rotted. Under the right arm was a basket, which also had rotted. In front of the effigy were several clam-shells.

[Mr. J. Bruce, formerly living in Mer, had a model made of Waïet which he presented to the Cambridge Museum. It is described and figured in the Reports (vi, p. 277, pl. xxii, fig. 6), but it bears no resemblance to Mr. Davies' description and sketch, so it must be regarded as worthless. Mr. Bruce said that round the brow of the original was a headband to which were fastened the ribs of men and women, *eud lera bir lid*, "dead men's ribs." In the model there is a necklet of three wooden pendants in front and one behind; these represent the pieces of bamboo and bones of dead people of the original; these rattled with a peculiar noise wherever he went. Mr. Bruce also presented to the Museum a model of the *sal* or *sale* (railings of the platform of a canoe) which formed the shrine of Waïet (i.e. pl. xxi, fig. 1).]

The Waïet ceremonial took place annually and lasted for eight days. No women or children were allowed to be present, and any woman who was caught trying to look at Waïet was immediately killed, or, if the ceremony was to take place in the near future, she would be kept to form one of the sacrifices.

At the time of the ceremonial all the families concerned went over to Dauar, where they camped. The men then formed a procession, and with the novices, captives, and a supply of food crossed over to Waier; the evening was spent in making preparations. The three *zogo-le* and the three *tami-leb* had come over previously, and, while the *tami-leb* cleared away any vegetable growth about the two ledges and gathered fresh coconuts for Waiet to sit down on, the *zogo-le* repaired any part of Waiet that needed attention. The *tami-leb* were also responsible for cleaning the clam-shells, bringing coconut oil and turtle grease for the anointing of Waiet, and preparing the vine rope used for hauling the captives up the cliff.

The next day the *zogo-le* took Waiet out of his recess and set him on the coconuts. Two *zogo-le* took up their position on either side of Waiet, and the *tami-leb* sat on the ledge below, and at the command of the chief *zogo-le* began to beat their drums, then the chief *zogo-le* danced. Everyone held in his mouth a red-painted shell, and instead of singing said, "Ha-ha, Ha-ha." The men below formed a grand procession; all who held office of any description came first with the regalia, then followed the novices, next the captives, and the last year's initiates formed the rear.

When the procession was over, the captives were placed under a guard. Then followed the presentation of peace offerings, and next the novices were brought forward to the foot of the cliff and were duly initiated. (Pasi would not tell Mr. Davies what took place, but denied that circumcision was a part of the ritual.) The young men were next taught the appropriate dances and songs.

The new initiates were taken to the place where the fire was to be made, then brought back, and hot coals from the sacred fire burning in front of Waiet were lowered down the cliff in a clam-shell by a vine. Each initiate was given some of the sacred fire, which he placed in a coconut shell, and then they were marched back to the cooking place, where they solemnly lighted the big fire to be used for cooking. It was their duty to see that this fire was kept ready for use, and also to get a supply of fuel. The captives were then divided into five groups, one for each day. They included prisoners exchanged for others from Erub or from New Guinea so as to avoid eating more relatives than they could help, men who had done wrong, and women who had been caught trying to look at Waiet.

The chief *zogo-le* ordered a tattoo of the drums, and then cried out, "Prepare the sacrifice!" The day's quota of captives was brought to the foot of the cliff and the *zogo-le* ordered that he (or they) should be cleansed. A captive was taken down to the water, scrubbed with pumice stone, and washed in the sea. Then he was taken to the foot of the cliff, fastened to the vine rope, and hauled up the cliff. The *zogo-le* marked off with lime on the body of the captive the portion each desired, and the *tami-leb* did the same. (The part most relished was the *susu*, breast of men, and the muscle of the arm; the *susu* of

women; but no particular part of children. By the way Pasi described it, he must have been very fond of it, having previously said that "man-meat tastes much sweeter than pig-meat.")

The chief *zogo-le* then described the cult of Waïet, and explained that it was essentially to promote human fertility, and in order that the concluding ceremony should be effective Waïet demanded a sacrifice first. As it was not seemly for the god to go to them, they must come to him and exhibit themselves for his inspection. (Pasi did not say whether Waïet ever rejected a sacrifice.)

The *tami-leb* then laid the bound captive in front of Waïet, the chief *zogo-le* took a bamboo knife, cut off the sexual organs, and placed them on Waïet's extended palm; a small clam-shell caught a certain amount of the escaping blood. The chief *zogo-le* killed the victim by striking him on the head with Waïet's stone-headed club. The marked portions of flesh were cut off, and the remains were lowered down the cliff and taken to the fire to be cooked.

If there were two or three captives in that day's quota, the sexual organs of the previous victim were taken from Waïet's hand and placed in the basket under his arm, and after the last victim had been killed the organs were placed on top of Waïet's head. When all the victims had been disposed of, Waïet was replaced in his recess in the cliff, and the *zogo-le* and *tami-leb* cooked their portions on the lower ledge. The other men laid coconut and banana leaves on the ground, on which the portions were served out.

The *Oour* [*aua* is primarily a term for mother's brother, but is given to all men of the mother's village of the same generation as the mother. Pasi belonged to Giar pit, the westerly point of Dauar, and his mother, Wam, belonged to an important family at Er; she had two brothers, Charlie and Maiwas, who died unmarried. There were close relations between Er and Dauar] or uncle of Pasi, carried a feather of a *gawei*, a big black and white bird (spoonbill) in each hand. The men beat the drums but did not sing, while the man with the feathers danced round the fire and, having chosen the portion he preferred, sat down in front of it. The other men, according to their age, seated themselves before the portion each fancied, the initiates, of course, coming last.

After the feast the time was devoted to special dances. In one dance the men held, in a throwing position, three-pronged spears made of hard wood from the Cape York peninsula. Another dance was performed with a dugong bone hung from the neck. In another, something was tied round the head, and the tongue painted red with *maïr* (this is a yellow ochre that comes from New Guinea and, when roasted, turns red); the man danced with his tongue protruding, and the men sitting in lines held their hands palms outwards, up level with their shoulders, and kept time with drums, saying "Ha-ha, Hoo-hoo!" In another dance a man wore a turtle-shell mask of a "barracouta," the open mouth of the fish being in front and the tail behind. [This may be in reference to the mask taken by Waïet from Nagir, which I was told represented a king-fish,

Cybium commersoni, the *gagai* or *debu* of the Western Islanders, and the *geigi* of the Miriam; cf. Reports, v, fig. 7, p. 54.] One dance, which belonged to Sagare (Tom Sergeant's father), was performed with beautifully carved bamboos on the fingers; the hands were held up, palms outwards and level with shoulders; the song, according to Pasi, was about a mother calling for her lost son. The songs and dances belonged to particular families, and could be performed only by members of the respective families. The office of the *zogo-le* and *tami-leb*, and *Oour* [?] was hereditary in the male line. It was usual for the eldest son, who would take that office, to have his wife chosen for him, so that the family should be kept very select. Pasi tells how his wife was chosen for him by his two uncles, as his father had died when he was about twelve years old.

After dancing the men went to rest in crevices in the rocks, as no houses or buildings were allowed to be erected; even now there are no houses on Waier.

The foregoing incidents occurred on each day of the ceremonies, and on the eighth day a farewell dance was performed before Waiet, who was then finally restored to his recess. The *zogo-le* and *tami-leb* descended the cliff and supervised the covering of the fire with sand. It was believed that, if anyone desecrated the beach of Ne by bringing a canoe there, Waiet would cause this fire to burn the canoe. A man did once bring a canoe there, and it was burnt—probably by his accidentally dropping a live coal when he got out of the canoe.

The procession then reformed, led by the *zogo-le*, *tami-leb*, and *Oour*, and to the solemn beating of the drums the men responded "Ha-ha, Ha-ha," as they marched round the island and crossed over to Dauar.

The women meanwhile had prepared a big feast for the concluding ceremony; fish, turtle, yams, sweet potatoes, coconuts, bananas, &c., were all ready and were placed on leaves on the ground so as to form an oval, at which the *zogo-le* sat at one end and the *tami-leb* at the other. The number of females present always exceeded that of the males, and included every female over the age of about twelve belonging to the Waiet fraternity, none being permitted to be absent.

By the time the feast was finished it was getting late in the afternoon, and the chief *zogo-le* stood up and explained to all present the significance of the cult of Waiet and its importance in maintaining the fertility of mankind, and how by means of the remaining part of the ceremony all the barren married women would have the opportunity of becoming productive.

The chief *zogo-le* then chose for himself the most favoured girl, the other *zogo-le* and the *tami-leb* in their order, followed by the *Oour*, selected their partners. Then at the signal of the chief *zogo-le* the men, with the exception of the initiates, rose up and seized any woman or girl they could, after which the initiates were allowed their choice of what was left. This license was permitted

for that one night only, and at sunrise next day all went to their own families, and any excess afterwards was punishable with death.

[The foregoing account of the cult of Waïet by Mr. Davies presents some features that are of great interest and were previously unknown to occur in Torres Straits. The more important are that it was a ceremony to ensure human fertility, and that cannibalism and promiscuity were an integral part of it.

A parallel may be drawn between the cult of Waïet and the big *Nogo* at Melpmes in the Newun district of Malekula (A. B. Deacon, MS.), the object of which was "to make men"; it ended with a rite of promiscuity, and was associated with a culture-hero named Ambat; but there is no need to go so far afield.

The *Moguru* of Kiwai is described by Landtman (The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea, 1927, p. 350) as the Life-giving ceremony and as being the most secret, sacred, and awe-inspiring ceremony of the Kiwai people. The *maure moguru* is particularly connected with the fertility of the sago-palms, and also serves to add to the strength and vitality of the people; promiscuity is indulged in, and it ends with the death of the old couples who conducted the rites. It is not stated how they die, nor is there any hint of cannibalism. But there does not appear to be any direct connection between the cult of Waïet and the *moguru*.

With regard to cannibalism, W. N. Beaver (Man, xiv, 1914, No. 74), in "Some notes on the eating of human flesh in the Western Division of Papua," says that "a long experience of almost every district of British Papua makes me incline to the view that, while ritual or ceremonial does in many instances form the prime reason for cannibalism, in by far the greater number of cases human flesh is eaten because it is a food and is liked." He adds: "Even at a village like Parama, at the mouth of the Fly, a native of the tribe told me that in his grandfather's time men were eaten. I am inclined to think that among the Kiwai-speaking tribes the same practice was not unknown. . . . From the western bank of the Fly eastwards it seems that in the case of a male the penis, and in the case of a female the vulva, were always cut out. These portions were used for various purposes."

Very little is known about the natives living between Mawata and the Netherlands boundary, but P. Wirz (Die Marindanim von Hollandisch-Süd-Neu-Guinea, Bd. ii, Teil iii, Hamburg, 1925) says that the Marind (who are known as Tugeri in British territory) state that three of their important cults came from the eastern area beyond the boundary. These are the *Mayo*, *Rapa*, and *Sosom*; the latter is a bull-roarer cult in which a monster is supposed to swallow novices. The *Mayo* is a typical annual initiation ceremony with instruction of the novices of both sexes in everyday occupations; finally admission to sexual life is celebrated by an orgy, in which it appears that cannibalism was also a

feature; the coconut is the cult object. The *Rapa* is a fire cult (and probably also a pig cult) of the fire-cassowary group with sexual excesses and cannibalism. Cannibalism and promiscuity also occur in the *Imo* cult and in the *Ezam* cult in the interior.

The traditional origin of the Waiet cult from the western part of British New Guinea is thus substantiated, as it is in agreement with analogous cults of that region. The only difficulties are—(1) that no indication was given to me in Mabuiag of the sinister aspects of the cult, but this was doubtless from prudential motives, and the same occurred in Mer, for though, as described to me, the cult there was essentially of an erotic character, the cannibalistic phase was hidden from all investigators, till Mr. Davies had the good fortune to discover it; (2) in Mabuiag, Waiet was said to be the head or chief of the *tai* or *markai*, the death-dances that were held on Pulu, a sacred islet off Mabuiag, and during these the people “thought about what Waiet did,” and all the women were frightened, I could not discover why. (Reports, v, p. 252.) There was a wooden effigy representing the mutilated, legless Waiet in a house on Widul, which only the old men might see; whenever they built a new house for Waiet some of the men dressed up as *zarar markai* and danced; this dance was also performed at Widul and Gumu three days after the ordinary *tai* ceremony.

Waiet is stated to have introduced to the Dauar and Waier people various *keber*, funeral ceremonies, so these people claim to be the *giz ged*, “original places” of the *keber*. The Dauar and Waier people in turn instructed certain groups of people on Mer; for example, Waiet taught the Dauar people the *zera markai keber*; they gave it to the people of Sebeg (*Kòmet le*) and Er (*Geaurem le*) on Mer, and in course of time ceased to practise it themselves; so when a Dauar or Waier man died, the Er people received a fire-signal and went over in their canoes to perform the *zera markai keber*. According to another account, Waiet gave it to the *Kòmet le*, but the *Geaurem le*, whose headquarters were at Er on the south-east side of Mer, brought it independently from Mabuiag. (Reports, vi, p. 128.) The *zera markai keber* was performed while a corpse was yet unburied (Reports, vi, p. 133), and it is acknowledged to be the same as the *zarar markai* of Mabuiag (v, p. 253; iv, fig. 249, p. 289); the drummers sang, not in the Miriam language, but corrupted words of the Western language.

In my final volume of the Reports, I shall again refer to this cult, and possibly may then be able to clear up some points which are at present obscure.]